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NICK CARTER

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Nick Carter's Mysterious Case;

OR,

THE ROAD-HOUSE TRAGEDY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER."



THE DEADLY BULLET CRASHED THROUGH THE GLASS, AND BURIED ITSELF IN THE BACK OF THE VICTIM'S HEAD.

NICK CARTER'S MYSTERIOUS CASE;

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THE ROAD-HOUSE TRAGEDY.

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CHAPTER I.

THE TRAGEDY.

"Crack!"

The sharp report of a revolver rings out upon the midnight air.

Simultaneously is heard the shivering of window-glass, followed by a loud cry of agony, a heavy fall, and a deep groan.

Then, for an instant, all is still, as though the horror of the act just consummated has paralyzed sound and activity.

Then one brief instant passes, and the air is filled with shouts and cries, while one prolonged scream rings out, far above the other noises.

There is the rush of many feet as people crowd into the room where the tragedy has taken place, only to behold a sight so full of horror that they turn away, sick with dismay and alarm.

William Burnham is dead.

While sitting in a chair near the window, which opens out into his own yard, the yard back of his own hotel, the assassin crept stealthily upon him, took careful aim through the glass, and fired.

The deadly bullet crashed its way past the glass, and buried itself in the back of the victim's head, stealing away his life instantly, and leaving the man, who, but a moment before, was full of energy and activity, a cold, senseless, pulseless corpse.

"Murder!" cries out the man who is Burnham's companion.

"What is it?"

"What has happened?"

"Who fired?"

"Is anybody hurt?"

Four people rush simultaneously into the room within twenty seconds of the sound of the pistol-shot.

Each shouts out a question as he enters, but Belden Green only points silently at the corpse upon the floor, still too greatly stupefied by the shock to speak or to act.

The answer to their questions lies there cold, still, dead.

They know that William Burnham has been murdered; that he has been mercilessly shot down by an unknown assassin, who, in order to fire the fatal shot, must have stood just outside of the window, and they rush into the yard crying for vengeance.

* * * * *

Let us go back to a time just fifteen minutes prior to the moment when the report of a pistol startled every person in the house.

It is nearly midnight.

The hands of the clock point at twenty-two minutes past eleven.

It is the night of December 23, 1891.

A buggy draws up at a corner two blocks away from the popular road-house, which is kept by William Burnham.

There are two people in the buggy, a man and a woman. The night is not particularly dark, nor yet is it moonlight. One can distinguish objects quite clearly at a considerable distance.

When the buggy stops, the man leaps to the ground, while the woman takes the reins, as though to await his return:

"Will you be long?" she asks.

"No; only about five minutes."

"Hurry."

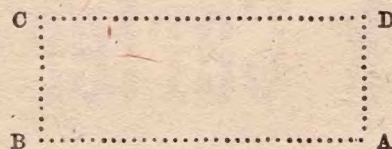
"Yes."

Then he glides away.

But his back is scarcely turned ere she also leaps from the buggy to the ground, after throwing the reins over the dashboard, seemingly regardless whether the horse takes a notion to move on, or to remain where he is.

She, too, hurries away, but in the opposite direction from that taken by the man.

Reader, take your pencil and draw an oblong square. Mark it thus:



Burnham's road-house is at A, and the buggy, with its two occupants, pauses at C. The man, who gets out first walks rapidly toward D, and the woman, who leaves the horse to care for himself, glides away toward B.

It is twenty-two minutes past eleven, when the buggy stops at C.

The horse, being left alone, moves along, step by step, not with any intention of wandering away, but simply because of a disinclination to stand still.

He moves toward B, because he is headed that way.

He goes very slowly, scarcely taking more than two or three steps in a minute, but even at that rate, after the lapse of five minutes, he has gone some little distance.

Had you, reader, been standing upon the corner at C during this time you would have wondered, doubtless, at the strange maneuvers of the pair who alighted from the buggy, and went their separate ways, apparently with no connection with each other's movements.

At twenty-eight minutes of twelve—or just ten minutes after the buggy stopped—you would have seen the man (who wore a slouch hat and full black beard, whose coat-collar was turned up about his ears, and whose shoulders stooped somewhat), turn the corner at D, and walk rapidly toward the spot where he had parted with his companion.

But he did not continue all the way to C.

At about the middle of the block, he paused abruptly and turned back again, once more disappearing around the corner.

Five minutes more pass.

It is exactly twenty-three minutes of twelve when the sharp report of a pistol is heard.

Two minutes later the woman suddenly reappears at the corner, B. The horse and buggy have almost reached it also, by this time, and the woman, with one bound, leaps into the seat, and grasps the reins.

Then she uses the whip, and the animal starts into unusual activity.

She is a good driver, for the horse turns at a trot, and

yet without touching the wheel to the crank-bar, or chafing-iron, as it is sometimes called.

In a half-minute, or less, they turn the corner at C, going toward D.

There is nobody in sight.

Still the woman does not rein in the animal.

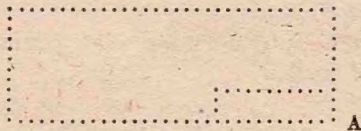
She drives rapidly to D, and turns to the right—that is, toward A.

But the corner is not completely turned when the man leaps toward her from the sidewalk.

The reins are tightened just enough to slow up sufficiently for the man to leap up beside the woman.

Then the left rein is pulled violently and the horse wheels again and dashes away at a fast trot at right angles with a line drawn from D to C, and directly away from A.

Refer to your diagram once more, reader. Draw an oblong square inside of the original square, at the corner A, thus:



The inner square represents the road-house, owned and conducted by William Burnham, the front being at the narrow end where you have placed the letter A.

At the time when the fatal shot was fired, the murdered man was in a back room on the ground floor in company with a friend and boon companion named Belden Green.

They were seated at a table, and were discussing race-horses, in which they were both deeply interested.

Both men had been drinking heavily, and neither had any thought of the terrible tragedy, which was so soon to be enacted.

It came, however, in the midst of their conversation.

There was no warning whatsoever.

It seemed almost as if the sound of breaking glass, the report of the pistol, and William Burnham's death-cry, happened simultaneously.

"I will bet you fifty to thirty that Vladimar is distanced," said Green.

"Take you!" cried Burnham. "I'll be shot, if I—"

He never finished the sentence.

The crack, the crash, the cry, the fall, the groan, and he was a corpse.

A dark figure had stolen through the gate into the backyard while they were sitting there.

It had peered through the window at them.

The owner of the figure had laughed softly, and yet, with a sound that was perfectly audible a few feet away.

Then the weapon had been raised, and careful aim taken.

The flash, the report, and sudden death followed.

Was the figure in the darkness that of a man, or a woman?

Who can tell?

Standing twenty feet away, in the obscure light, it would have been impossible to determine.

It was a strange-looking figure, with slouch hat pulled far down over the eyes, while the size and shape of the form were completely hidden beneath the folds of a huge lap-robe, such as are used in driving when the weather is cold.

The fatal bullet having been sent upon its errand of death, the owner of the figure did not turn and fly with all speed, but laughed again while for one instant the dread weapon was pointed at the heart of Belden Green.

"Why not?" whispered the strange being. "And yet, what's the use? Bah! I am even with Will Burnham, at all events."

Then it glided away; not precipitately, but as though confident of its ability to avoid detection for the awful crime. It glided away, and the darkness swallowed it.

* * * * *

One more glance at the strange buggy, and then to the solution of the mysterious case.

When the man leaped into it at the corner (D), he seized the reins, and said, savagely:

"Where were you?"

"When?"

"Just now. I came back to the corner. The buggy was gone; you were not there."

"Did you go way to the corner?"

"No."

"If you had, you would have found me."

"Why didn't you wait where you were?"

"Because I considered it safest to move. Did you deliver the note?"

"No."

"No! Why not?"

"I had no chance. I tried twice."

"Didn't you see him?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I tell you I didn't deliver it."

"Then give it back to me."

The man felt in his pocket. Then he swore. Then he looked once more, and swore again.

"I haven't got it. I've lost it," he said, presently.

She did not seem to care much for the note, although she frowned when he said that he had lost it.

"Where did you go with the note?" she asked.

"Where you told me to go."

"Nowhere else?"

"No."

"Who fired a pistol?"

"How do I know?"

"Didn't you hear one?"

"Yes."

"Who was it?"

"Somebody shooting at a cat, I suppose. How the dev—"

"Didn't you hear a cry?"

"What kind of a cry?"

"Like a man who was wounded?"

"No."

"I thought that I did."

"What of it?"

"Have you deceived me, Bert?"

"No."

"Did you quarrel with Will?"

"Not to any extent."

"Where did you see him?"

"At the front door."

"Nowhere else?"

"No."

"Bert, did you fire that pistol?"

"I?"

"Yes."

"No."

"Listen to me," she said, coldly, and she turned and looked him squarely in the face. "I believe that a murder

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was committed there to-night, and my intuition tells me that Will Burnham was shot. If he was shot, and if you are the murderer, I will give you up to justice as surely as you sit beside me now."

The man shrugged his shoulders, but made no reply to her words.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE CLIENT.

Nick Carter and his assistant, Chick, were seated together in the great detective's Liberty street office, which was popularly supposed to be the headquarters of one T. Bolt.

Nick was arrayed in his now famous character of "Old Thunderbolt," otherwise known as Joshua Juniper.

Chick looked like a bootblack who had been invited in from the street to shine the detective's boots, for he was seated upon a low stool with a blacking-box at his side and a brush in either hand.

Although he seemed ready to begin work at any instant, the actual operation of "shining" had not yet commenced.

"She should be here in a few moments, Chick," said the detective. "When the bell rings, begin work."

"Yes, sir."

Nick had arranged an ingenious, though well-known, device by which nobody could approach his office, without involuntarily announcing the fact.

The mat at the foot of the stairs covered an electric button, which rang a muffled bell in the detective's office.

The person who caused the bell to ring could not hear it from where he or she stood, and was, therefore, all unconscious of the fact that the approach was known before the first step of the stairs had been passed.

Such was nevertheless the fact.

That Nick Carter was expecting a caller, and that he wished Chick to overhear all that took place was evident, and Chick was only waiting for the bell to ring, to begin his task of shining the shoes of Mr. T. Bolt, detective.

Chick had just entered when we discovered them.

"Here is the letter," said Nick; "read it for yourself."

Chick took the missive and read:

"MR. T. BOLT.

"Dear Sir: I have been informed that you are a very expert detective. You have doubtless heard of the mysterious murder of William Burnham at his hotel. I have reasons for wishing to engage your services in connection with that affair, and to that end, I will call upon you at noon of the 26th. I hope that I will find you at your office, and that you will consent to receive me as your client.

"Very truly yours,

"BARBARA BENNETT."

"Doesn't say much," murmured Chick.

"No."

"Queer sort, I guess."

"Shouldn't wonder."

"Have you heard of such a name, mentioned in connection with the Burnham murder?"

"No."

"Nor I."

Suddenly the bell rang.

"There she is, Chick; go to work, now."

Chick got upon his knees, placed the detective's right foot upon the box, and began in true professional style to polish his boots.

Presently there came a tap upon the door.

Nick paid no attention, and it was repeated.

"Come in!" he called.

The door opened, and a woman entered.

She might have been young or old, beautiful or ugly, but she had left no means of determining those facts.

A heavy veil entirely concealed her face, and was so adjusted that it hid her throat as well.

"Mr. Bolt?" she asked.

"I be, ma'am."

"I am Barbara Bennett."

"Git out! be yew? Won't yew sit?"

"Thank you, yes. You received my letter, I suppose?"

Nick nodded.

"Will you take my case in hand?"

"Mebby."

"Can you not say positively?"

"Not till I hear it."

"How soon will you be alone?"

"Sum'er's about milkin' time."

"I beg your pardon?"

"About dark."

"Will it take until dark for that young man to finish blacking your boots?"

"Not quite."

"Then I will wait until he is through."

"Suit yewerself, ma'am; only ef yew dew that, yew'll have ter wait till another day ter see me."

"Why?"

"Cos I gotter go out in jest fifteen minutes. Can't wait, nohow. Important matter, and——"

"But I don't want to talk to you before him."

"Afraid he'll hear yew?"

"Yes."

"Wal, ef yew hev a mind tew ax him tew go out, I don't keer."

"Young man!" said the woman to Chick.

He paid no attention.

"Young man!" she repeated.

If he heard her, he made no sign.

"Young man!"

"Yew'll hev tew screech a leetle louder, ma'am, ef yew want him tew hear yew. He's deefer'n a stone hitchin' post."

"Then he can't hear what we say, can he?"

"Don't look's though he could, does it?"

"No."

"Then say yewer say; I've got about ten minutes left."

"Have you heard of the Burnham murder, Mr. Bolt?"

"Most people hev."

"Has any trace of the murderer been discovered?"

"Not es I've heer'd about."

"Do you think you could find the assassin?"

"The wot?"

"The murderer?"

"Mebby—an' mebbly not."

"I have come to you on a strange errand, sir."

"Yew hev, eh?"

"Yes."

"Wot is it?"

"In the first place, I have no interest in the crime, or in the criminal, other than to discover the present location of certain articles of personal property that belong to me, and to secure possession of them."

"Then you don't want me tew hunt fur the murderer?"

"Yes, I do."

"Wot fur?"

"The person who killed William Burnham has my prop-

erty. I want to recover it, and you may suit yourself about giving the criminal up to justice."

"What is the property?"

"A package of papers, not so large but that it can be conveniently carried in a man's coat-pocket."

"What air the papers?"

"A will, a marriage certificate, and a deed."

"Humph! Whose will?"

"The will of Darius Bennett, of Chicago."

"What marriage certificate?"

"One that certifies to the marriage of Barbara Bennett to William Burnham Judson, which marriage took place in Chicago in 1879."

"What deed?"

"A deed of gift from Barbara Bennett to William B. Judson, which was executed and delivered the day before the wedding."

"Was it recorded?"

"I think not. I care very little about the deed. I only described it, as it forms a part of the package of papers that you are to discover. I also care but little about the marriage certificate."

"Ah! Then it's the will yew want?"

"Yes, the will."

"Are you the Barbara Bennett mentioned?"

"I am."

"How do you know that those papers are in the possession of the murderer of William Burnham?"

"Because I know that William Burnham had them before he was shot."

"Yew furget, ma'am, that the man was killed by being shot while in the house, by a person upon the outside, and that whoever did the shootin', had no time nor opportunity tew git hold of the papers, even if Burnham did have 'em."

"I beg your pardon; I do not."

"Oh! yew don't, eh?"

"No. I am familiar with all the circumstances of the shooting. I have read the papers very carefully."

"Indeed."

"I know that Burnham was shot while sitting with his back toward a window, which looks out into his back-yard."

"I know that he was not alone at the time."

"I know that the assassin had no time or opportunity to get the papers then from the pockets of the murdered man."

"But I also know that the papers were not upon his person at the time."

"Oh? Well, yew seem tew know a lot. Mebby yew'll tell me some more. Where were the papers?"

"In his overcoat pocket."

"Where was the overcoat?"

"In the bar-room."

"Well, how in—"

"Wait. Were there not several people in the bar-room when the shot was fired?"

"I believe so."

"Did they not all rush pell-mell to the scene of the murder?"

"I s'pose they did."

"That is, everybody except the murdered man's wife. She fainted, I have read."

"Yes."

"Very well, suppose two people worked together to get possession of those papers."

"Well?"

"Suppose one of them was just outside, in front of the road-house, while the other went into the yard."

"I'm s'posin'; go on."

"When the shot was fired, the bar-room was cleared. The person in front of the house simply opened the door of the bar-room, stepped inside, placed one hand in Burnham's overcoat pocket, found what was wanted, secured it, and withdrew."

"Such an act would not require thirty seconds. The excitement would be such that nobody would think of such a thing, and the two who knew the most about the crime, could walk quietly away unmolested. Do you follow me, Mr. Bolt?"

"Yew bet! say."

"Well?"

"How'd yew know so much?"

"Because I had seriously thought of trying some such plan, not, of course, including the crime of murder, myself."

"Jest tew git the papers, hey?"

"Yes."

"Where were yew the night of the murder?"

"I was within half a block of the scene of the crime when it was committed."

"The duse yew were!"

"It is true, sir."

"Mebby yew saw somebody there?"

"Maybe I did."

"The murderer?"

"Perhaps."

"Humph! Madam, will you oblige me by shovin' back that air vail?"

"No, sir."

"Humph!"

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CHAPTER III.

THE WOMAN'S STORY.

Even Nick Carter was somewhat puzzled by the strange demeanor of his mysterious client, her boldness and her thorough knowledge of the facts connected with the murder of William Burnham.

"Yew don't want me tew see yewer face, hey?" he said, slowly.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Excuse me, but my face has nothing to do with the business in hand."

"Mebby it's got a good deal."

"How so?"

"Wal, it sorter strikes me that yew've succeeded in making out a purty strong case ag'in' yewerself."

The woman laughed aloud.

"Do you think so?" she asked.

"It looks that way."

"You should not risk your reputation, as a detective, by making such a statement as that, Mr. Bolt."

"Mebby not," replied Nick, quietly. "I'm lookin' fur somebody tew give me a few lessons. Mebby I kin engage yew."

Again she laughed.

"Don't lose your temper, Mr. Bolt," she said. "I will admit that your statement may not seem as absurd to you as it does to me. I will also admit that there was a time when I thought seriously of devising some scheme of putting Burnham out of the way. I abandoned it, however, long ago, and when I started for the vicinity of his hotel on the night of the 23d, I had no more idea of such a thing than you had."

"I heard the pistol-shot when it was fired, and I saw something of the tumult that followed; enough to satisfy me that I could not successfully carry out my own schemes that night, and I hurried away."

"I believed that the shot was the result of a bar-room fight, and had no idea that William Burnham had been killed, until I saw the papers the following day."

"Then I began making certain inquiries which will neither interest you, nor help you in the work you have to do; but the result of them is that I have satisfied myself that the crime was the result of careful premeditation, and that the motive was the possession of the papers to which I have referred."

"I believe that I can put you on the track of the assassin, if you care to take the case. If not, I shall apply to another detective."

"I will give you one thousand dollars for your expenses, and put you in possession of all the facts I know. If you recover the papers, and deliver them to me, I will give you ten thousand dollars more. If you fail to recover them, I will pay you nothing more. You can do precisely as you please regarding the murderer. You can give him up to justice, or you can let him go. I have no interest in that part of it. Personally, I am not sorry that the man was killed, nor would I have objected to his remaining

alive. I only make one stipulation regarding this part of it."

"What is that?"

"If you decide to deliver the murderer over to the law, you must secure sufficient evidence of another kind, so that you will not be obliged to make any use whatever of the papers to convict him."

"That's fair enough."

"Yes, I think so. Now, will you take the case?"

"Yes."

"Here are one thousand dollars. Please write a receipt for the amount, stating why it is paid."

Nick did so.

"I perceive that although your boot black is a very slow workman, he has finished your boots. If you will dismiss him now, I will tell the rest of my story."

Nick dropped a dime into Chick's hand, and pointed to the door. Chick nodded, and went out.

As soon as he reached the pavement, he hurried around the corner into Pearl street and disappeared, but fifteen minutes later, a young man, with leather-apron and bale-hook, who looked like a truckman, was sitting upon a box on the curb, in front of Old Thunderbolt's office, kicking his heels and whistling.

It was Chick, who had returned for the purpose of awaiting a signal from his master, which would tell him whether he was to follow the mysterious client or not.

In the meantime, the woman had been left alone with Nick.

"Now, madam," he said to her, "I hain't got much more time, an' ef yew'll be kind enough tew talk fast, I'll be dewly obleeged. Fust, how'd yew know thet Burnham had them papers?"

"Because they were missing, a week before he was killed. They had been taken from the place where I expected to find them, and I learned that he had been there a little while before."

"Then he knew where they were?"

"I did not know that he did."

"Had he any interest in 'em?"

"None."

"Have you?"

"Yes."

"In the will?"

"Yes."

"Did you make any effort to get the papers before the night of the murder?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"I employed two different persons to get them for me."

"They didn't succeed?"

"Both failed utterly."

"Who were those persons?"

"A man and a woman."

"Who were they?"

"A man named Miller —"

"The one who has been suspected of having some motive in connection with this crime?"

"Yes."

"The woman's name?"

"Blanche Bullard."

"Ah! How did you happen to employ those two?"

"I knew that Burnham was in love with Blanche Bullard."

"Yes."

"I knew that Miller was also."

"Well?"

"I found out that the Bullard girl cared nothing for Burnham, but was really in love with Miller. She was, however, afraid of Burnham, for some reason that I have not found out, and, fearing him, she learned to hate him most cordially."

"You showed her a way to get even."

"I did."

"Did you suggest the pistol?"

"I'm not such a fool."

"Tell me what you did do?"

"I told Blanche Bullard about the papers, without telling her what they were."

"Well?"

"I described the package in which they were tied to-

gether, and told her that Burnham carried it about with him. I agreed to pay her a thousand dollars for the papers, and she swore that she would get them. She got her thousand dollars, but I did not get the papers."

"How was that?"

"The night before the shooting, she brought me a package. I needed but to glance at it to feel assured that it was the package that I wanted. I paid her the money, and she went away."

"Then I opened the package, and very quickly discovered that I had been hoaxed, either by Burnham himself, or by the woman to whom I had paid the money."

"The outside of the package was all right, but the papers that I wanted were not there."

"You were angry."

"I was furious."

"What did you do?"

"I started at once to find Blanche Bullard."

"Did you succeed?"

"Yes."

"What occurred?"

"I claimed my money, and she refused to return it."

"What did she say?"

"She said she had had trouble enough to get the papers; that she had taken the package from Burnham's coat, and that when she handed it to me, I had said that it was the package that I wanted. I could not deny that, and so I left, resolved to get the papers myself."

"Where does the man come in?"

"Miller?"

"Yes."

"He was present when I first engaged the Bullard girl to do the work."

"Then you did not really engage him?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"He wanted to know if I would pay him the same amount that I had offered Blanche, if he got them for me. I told him I would, and he said that he would get them."

"Have you seen him since?"

"No."

"You believe now that they made another attempt to get the papers, and that the murder was the result?"

"No."

"What then? It was the morning of the 23d that you started out on your own hook, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"You stated a while ago that you knew the papers were in Burnham's overcoat, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"How did you know that?"

"I had followed him and watched him all day long."

"Ah!"

"I saw him put them there."

"Do you think that either Miller or Blanche Bullard shot Burnham?"

"No."

"I thought you did."

"I don't."

"Did somebody else know of the existence of these papers?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"The man who now has them."

"Do you know who he is?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"His name is Albert Dorning."

"Can you describe him?"

"Yes."

"Do so."

"He is tall—nearly six feet in height; not very broad-shouldered or heavy, and yet possessed of great strength. He wears a mustache and long side-whiskers—"

"Like the fellow who was known to be loafing around the hotel sometime before the shooting?"

"Yes."

"Do you think that was Dorning?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where he can be found?"

"No."

"Have you no idea?"
 "If I had, I would not come to you."
 "How did Dorning know about these papers?"
 "I told him."
 "You!"
 "Yes."
 "When?"
 "Two years ago."
 "Why did you do that?"
 "It does not matter why; it is enough that I did tell him, and that I have since discovered that I was foolish to do so. Have you never believed that you could trust a person, and found out your mistake too late?"

CHAPTER IV.

HUNTING HORSE-HAIRS.

"Why," asked Nick, "if you are so positive regarding the name and description of the man who you say shot William Burnham, do you come to me to find him for you? One would think, since you know the man so well, that you would have no difficulty in finding him yourself."

"If you knew him, you would understand; not knowing him, I will explain."

"Please do so."

"He is a sphinx—a mystery—a phantom—a devil. He is here to-day and gone to-morrow and back again the day following. He wears a hundred different disguises, and delights in deceiving others. Such is Albert Dorning."

"Humph! You suggested a manner in which this strange robbery was committed?"

"Yes."

"To work out your theory, there must have been two people concerned in the affair."

"Yes."

"If Dorning did it, he had a confederate."

"Yes."

"Have you any idea who that confederate could have been?"

"None."

"You knew that the papers you wanted were in Burnham's overcoat pocket, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Did you see Dorning after Burnham put the papers there?"

"No."

"Then how did he know where they were?"

"I don't know."

"Prior to the day of the murder, when did you see Burnham last?"

"Not in a long time."

"Weeks, months, years, or only days?"

"About two weeks."

"Did you talk to him, then?"

"No."

"Did he see you?"

"Not to recognize me."

"What are the contents of the will that you wish me to recover?"

"That is something that cannot concern you, sir."

"Perhaps not. Now once more, will you reveal your face to me?"

"No."

"How am I to know for whom I am at work?"

"It is unnecessary that you should know more than you do now."

"We may differ in that idea, ma'am."

"I am the employer, you, the employee. It is for me to make terms, sir, not you."

"Indeed. This is the thousand dollars you just gave me, isn't it?" and Nick laid the money in the woman's lap.

"I believe so."

"Will you count it?"

"Why so?"

"To see if it is correct."

"There are ten one-hundred-dollar bills."

"Count them."

She did so.

"They are correct," she said.

"Very good, ma'am. Now, oblige me by putting them into your pocket."

"Eh? But they are for you."

"I don't want 'em."

"Why? You surely will not take my case without pay?"

"Neither with nor without it."

"Do you refuse the case?"

"I do."

"But—"

"Excuse me, ma'am. I am not the employee now. My time is up. I must go. Our interview is at an end."

"I will double your pay; I will triple it."

"If you should multiply it by ten, I would not touch it. Now, will you permit me to close my office?"

"You agreed to take my case."

"Before I understood it, yes. Now I refuse. I will say one thing which may convince you that you do not want to employ me after all. If I took the case, I should devote my energies to finding out all about you, before I looked for your friend Albert Dorning. Good-day, ma'am."

"Bah! you are a fool, sir."

"All the more reason why you should seek another detective. I really must go now."

Nick saw that the woman fairly trembled with anger.

She turned and walked to the door.

Then she paused with her hand upon the knob, and faced Nick for a moment as if about to speak.

But no words came.

She wheeled suddenly, and went out, slamming the door behind her.

"Well," muttered Nick, "she's the queerest character that I have dealt with yet. She either knows more about the murder of William Burnham than she cares to tell, or else she's a crank; and I guess the latter term just about fills the bill."

"Anyhow, Chick will find out all there is to know, in a few hours, and now, I'll just keep my engagement and skip over to Burnham's Road-House."

Nick had already been engaged to work up the murder mystery surrounding the death of William Burnham, and he lost no time in hurrying to the scene of the crime, leaving Chick to shadow the mysterious woman who had called upon him, and whom, because she had referred to that very crime in her letter—he had wanted to see.

It was about half-past two when he reached the house where the murder had been committed, still wearing his Old Thunderbolt disguise.

He was shown at once to the room where the murdered man had sat when he was so suddenly shot down.

Burnham had not been directly in front of the window, but a little to the right of it, as one looked into the room from the yard.

There was the hole made by the bullet in the glass, which told its awful tale of horror.

There was nothing in the room that interested Nick. A dozen detectives had been there and pulled and hauled everything this way and that, since the fatal shot was fired.

He shrugged his shoulders, and went out across the hall and into the alley-way that runs along the north side of the house, and thence into the back-yard.

The window, he found, was nearly ten feet from the ground.

He calculated the spot where the death-chair was located in the little room where Burnham was shot, and then he selected the spot where he judged the person who used the pistol must have stood.

"Just about here," he mused.

Hundreds of feet had trod the ground since the murderer stood there, and yet the detective examined it carefully, particularly about the spot where he stood.

Presently he stooped and picked up a long horse-hair, and began winding it around his fingers.

After a little he strolled through the alley on the north side of the house, and while his manner did not indicate that he was particularly interested in his occupation, his restless eyes were roaming back and forth, taking in every detail of the place with more than ordinary care.

He reached the street, and turned back again toward the yard.

Then he drew near to the fence that separated it from William street.

His eyes ran along the stringers, and then along the top of the fence.

Then he stepped forward, and raising himself somewhat, he seized the top stringer and pulled himself up.

Another horse-hair was presently wound around the finger with the first, and a little tuft of wool, such as might be torn from manufactured goods of some kind was in his grasp, when he again leaped to the ground.

He spent a full minute in examining the bit of wool.

It was a mixture of shreds; some were black and some were red, while there were not more than a dozen in all.

Suddenly he placed the shreds to his nose, and drew in a long breath.

"I thought so," he muttered. "These came from a horse-blanket, or from a robe of some kind that has been in constant use around a horse. The horse was a sorrel, too, or a chestnut. No, a sorrel, and those hairs came from the mane, I think."

"Good, so far. Funny that nobody has found these things before me. Horse-hairs are too common, I suppose."

"Still, there is another view to take. Some of the curious crowd that have yearned for a look at this place, might have climbed up there and left these things. Still, that would hardly account for the hair in the yard, just where the murderer probably stood."

"Let me see; if a horse-blanket came over that fence with the murderer, and that horse-blanket had been upon or behind a sorrel horse, as I imagine, these two hairs would not be the only ones that were dropped."

"There would be others somewhere around; shorter ones, and the winds that have blown since, and the tramping of many feet would not have disposed of them all."

"I think I will go on a hunt for horse-hairs."

He began at once, making his starting point the spot where he believed the murderer stood when the shot was fired.

The result of his search was one of the most remarkable specimens of detective work that Nick Carter ever did.

CHAPTER V.

WONDERFUL WORK.

Nick Carter spent nearly half an hour, groping around the yard in the rear of Burnham's road-house.

He found five short horse-hairs, as fine as silk, and not over half an inch in length, near the spot where he had picked up the first one that came from the animal's mane.

Between that place and the fence, he picked up three more.

Then he searched toward the alley, and through it, but found nothing.

Then he passed out through the alley, and turned the corner on to William street.

He did not spend any time in searching until he reached the point near the fence, where he had found the shreds of wool.

There he began another minute search.

"The wind would influence them more here than in the yard," he mused, "and yet some of them should be left for me to find."

He brushed aside lumps of dirt, little sticks, and the bits of waste that will gather against a fence where the wind has a chance to sweep along without impediment.

Now and then his search was rewarded by the finding of a hair.

It was strange that he only picked them up to throw them aside again, but that was what he did, taking care, however, to so dispose of them that he would not find the same hair the second time.

First he searched back toward the corner from whence he had come, but he found fewer and fewer, and presently none at all.

Then he returned to the starting-point, and searched in the other direction.

The reader must not suppose that the ground was strewn with horse-hairs, for such was not the case.

During the entire search from beginning to end, he found, in all, only twenty-one hairs; but he found them in places which revealed the direction from which the blanket that had contained them had been brought.

If the reader will refer again to the diagram, the oblong

square, he will see that Nick now started toward the point marked "B."

It was a fatiguing search, and no one not possessed of the wonderful patience of an expert and thorough detective, would have continued it as he did.

But his efforts were constantly meeting with rewards.

Now and then he found a hair, and each hair found told the detective something.

The hairs he found were not always sorrel in color, either.

He occasionally picked up a bay one, or a black one, or one that he believed had some time adorned the back of a dog.

Nevertheless he did find sorrel hairs, and each one that he found took him nearer to the corner, B.

At last he reached the corner.

By that time several people were curiously observing the actions of the strange old man, who looked as though he had suddenly been translated from the backwoods into their midst.

They thought that he was crazy; they jeered at him; but he paid no attention.

Exactly upon the corner, he paused, stooped over, and began to scrape in the dirt, where he found several of the hairs, and a few more shreds of wool (only three this time) clinging to the end of a jagged stick, which was a piece of a broken barrel-hoop.

Then he noticed a circular spot in the earth, close beside the pavement.

It was an indentation, and just such an one as a person would make by throwing the entire weight upon one heel and then turning the foot first one way and then another.

The circular indentation was small, too.

Not such as would be made by the heel of a man's boot, but rather by a woman's shoe.

Nick observed another thing as he remarked the spot, and that was that the heel that had ground the hole had been provided with little steel guards, such as are often put on high heels to prevent them from wearing away at one side.

"I had begun to suspect it," he muttered. "Now, let us see why she paused here and dropped the blanket upon the ground, and why she ground her heel into the earth in that way."

"She would not have dropped the blanket if she had not needed the use of both hands, which would be necessary, in case she wished to remove an empty shell from the chamber of a revolver."

"Good! having removed it, and replaced it by a good cartridge, she dropped the useless shell upon the ground and pressed it out of sight in the soil with her heel."

"Now, let me see if I am correct. If I am, I should find a cartridge-shell right in that spot."

He took the bit of barrel-hoop and began digging.

The second jab that he made was fruitful.

He turned up an empty shell.

Placing it in his pocket, he straightened up and looked around him.

Suddenly his eye caught sight of an object that nobody but Nick Carter would have noticed.

It was a piece of dirty rag, but it happened to be exactly what he was searching for, and he quickly secured it.

"Correct!" he muttered. "Two and two make four, every time; I never knew it to fail. This is a queer piece of rag to be galloping around the street here, for unless I am greatly mistaken, it once formed part of a very delicate cambric handkerchief."

"How dirty it is, too. Looks just as though somebody had used it to clean an axle with."

He wrapped the empty cartridge-shell in the dirty rag, and placed them both in his pocket, and then he walked slowly along the edge of the walk toward John street.

Several times he paused and studied different things that he noticed as he moved along.

It was nearly dark when he found himself again on Washington avenue, but he felt that he had accomplished a great deal, and that he could now see his way very clearly to a speedy solution of the mystery.

Nevertheless, he did not hurry away from the neighborhood, but having lost himself from the view of others, he changed his disguise to one that gave him the appearance

of a police officer in citizen's clothes, and then he began a systematic visit at every house in the neighborhood.

His statement and inquiry were the same at every house.

"I am a detective. Did anybody in this house see or hear a horse driven rapidly by on the night of the murder, at about the time that it was committed?"

The answers were varied, but they were, withal, confirmatory with his theory, and at last he found a man who had seen a horse and buggy.

"It had driven down John street to Washington avenue," he said, "and turned south."

"Then it must have gone directly past Burnham's house," said Nick.

"No; it wheeled and went off the other way."

"How many were in the buggy?" asked Nick.

"Two, I think; but I won't be sure."

"They drove rapidly?"

"Very."

"You say it first turned toward William street?"

"Yes."

"Then wheeled and went the other way?"

"Yes."

"What color was the horse?"

"I didn't notice; bay, I think."

"Wasn't it sorrel?"

"I can't say."

"You are not sure that it was not sorrel?"

"No."

Nick did not see Superintendent Brown until the following morning, but he was closeted with that gentleman by half-past eight.

"Well, Carter, have you anything to tell me this morning?" asked the superintendent.

"Yes."

"What?"

"The person who shot William Burnham was a woman."

"Think so?"

"I know it."

"Hem! well?"

"She came here in a carriage, or rather a buggy that was drawn by a sorrel horse."

"Bless me! this is getting things down fine."

"She was accompanied by a man."

"They both left the buggy on John street at the first corner west of Washington avenue."

"The horse was headed toward the south."

"Wait. How do you know all this?"

"I know that there were two in the buggy, and I know that the horse was left alone; therefore they both got out of the buggy."

"How do you know that the horse was left alone?"

"By the way in which he wandered along toward William street, and I know that by his droppings and the marks left by the wheels in several places where they have not been since obliterated."

"I know the color of the horse by hairs that I have found."

"Go ahead; I'm all attention."

"The woman turned toward William street; the man went the other way."

"Down John, eh?"

"Yes. The woman carried a red-and-black horse-blanket, or lap-rebe with her."

"She managed in some way, and just how I do not yet know, to scale the fence which separates the yard back of the hotel from William street."

"I know just where she stood when she fired the shot that killed Burnham."

"Then she left, going out the same way that she got in."

"When she reached the corner, she dropped the blanket upon the ground and then removed the empty shell from her revolver."

"Having removed it, she dropped it upon the ground, and pressed it in, out of sight, with the heel of her shoe."

"Then she tore a piece of cambric out of the center of her handkerchief, and with that wiped the empty chamber and the barrel of her weapon."

"Then she reloaded the chamber that had been used, returned the revolver to her pocket, picked up the blanket, ran to the buggy, leaped in, seized the reins, turned the horse, drove back to John street, down John to Washing-

ton avenue, and started to turn toward William to find her companion.

"But he met her almost as she reached the corner, and the horse was quickly turned the other way, and the pair drove off."

"There, chief, is the story of the murder, and I would stake my reputation that it is true."

"But how in the world have you discovered so much? My men have been searching day and night with no results, and you tell the story of the crime in a few hours. How do you know all this?"

CHAPTER VI.

PUTTING TWO AND TWO TOGETHER.

Nick regarded the superintendent with a smile on his face.

"It is very simple," he said.

"How so?"

"If I build a house, I first dig my cellar and then lay my foundation wall. If I write a letter, I have a pretty general idea of what I am going to say before I begin. If a crime is committed and I seek to find its perpetrator, I begin at the beginning."

"To successfully work out the mysteries connected with a crime, it is essential to begin where the criminal began, and to keep moving forward. The mistake that the average detective makes, is that he begins in the middle—that is, puts up his balloon-frame before he has begun his foundation, and the inevitable result is that the structure falls in ruins, leaving the builder worse off than he was before, simply because he is forced to clear away the debris before he can recommence his work."

"All very fine, Carter, in theory."

"In practice also."

"Tell me how you worked out this case to the point you have reached."

"I first went into the room, and found the exact location of the chair in which Burnham sat when he was shot."

"Yes."

"Then I went into the yard and picked out the place where the murderer must have stood when he fired."

"Well?"

"Having satisfied myself that I was standing almost in the murderer's foot-prints, I still believed the criminal to be a man, and I began to examine the ground at that point."

"A hundred had stood there since the murder."

"Very true."

"Well?"

"Presently I found a horse-hair, such as would be shed from the mane or tail of a sorrel horse."

"Horse-hairs are found everywhere."

"True; and I picked that one up more from habit than anything else, and did not, in any sense, connect it with the murderer at that moment."

"I sometimes think that there is a magnetic current of thought when I touch an article connected with a crime, that brings my mind involuntarily in association with the truth."

"Psychology, eh?"

"Perhaps so. I looked around the yard, and presently went to the fence."

"Ah!"

"Clinging to the top of the fence, I found another hair, exactly like the one I had discovered in the yard."

"I climbed upon the fence, and found several shreds which had been pulled, rather than torn from a horse-blanket, or woollen lap-rebe."

"Wait; how do you know that they came from such an article?"

"By the smell. Anything that is in constant contact with a horse, or that is habitually left in a stable, smells 'horsey,' and any quantity of airing will not altogether destroy the odor."

"True; go on."

"Then, for the first time, I connected the horse-hairs and the shreds with the person who shot Burnham."

"I see."

"I resolved to hunt horse-hairs."

"Horses are not shedding their coats now. The hairs you found might have been there for weeks."

"That is true. I recognized the force of that argument, even when I began my strange search."

"The odor clinging to the shreds was, however, too strong to render the presumption possible that they had been there very long. The fact that horses are not shedding their coats now had very little to do with the matter."

"Why?"

"Because the blanket was of rough, coarse wool. If used about the horse when he was shedding, they would cling to it for years, as you know, and no amount of brushing could get them off."

"Exactly."

"On the other hand, they would keep dropping, continually, and the blanket could not be moved without dislodging an occasional one."

"True again; but by your own admission you may have found hairs that were growing upon a horse last summer, or a year ago, while if it is true that there is a horse in this case, he may have been black or bay, and you be none the wiser, since he is not now shedding."

"You forget the two hairs from the mane, or tail."

"What have they to do with it?"

"They are stiff and coarse, as well as long."

"Well?"

"They would not cling to the blanket for any length of time, but would be easily shaken off."

"Hum!"

"Their presence, in connection with the others, satisfies me that the blanket from which they dropped, was in use very shortly before that time, about a sorrel horse. You will admit the force of that argument."

"Yes."

"I was satisfied that a woolen blanket had come over that fence, and that the blanket had been in use about a sorrel horse. I was satisfied that the blanket went to the very spot where the murderer must have stood when the shot was fired. I was also satisfied that it went no further."

"I will admit that you interest me."

"Thanks! I next went to the street, hair-hunting, for I believed then that I should find out the direction taken by the person who carried the blanket, and that it would bring me to a point where a horse and buggy had been in waiting."

"I was not mistaken."

"I turned west, and by degrees—that is, by the occasional finding of a hair, worked my way past the Catholic Church to the next corner."

"Standing upon the corner, I noticed a piece of broken barrel-hoop with a jagged end. One end of the stick was wedged in under a stone so that it could not be easily moved. To the other end there were clinging more shreds of wool like those that I had found upon the fence."

"I leaned over to examine it more carefully, and found a little nest of several of the short hairs lying about."

"I said at once, 'the blanket was dropped here. When it was picked up, it caught upon the jagged end of that stick.'"

"Then came the question, 'Why was it dropped here? accidentally or for a purpose?'"

"Evidently for a purpose."

"What purpose?" asked the chief.

"That was the next question that I asked myself. The answer was obvious."

"I don't see it."

"Simply because the person who dropped it, wished to use both hands in such a way that holding the blanket would be an impediment."

"How an impediment?"

"To speed, if not to freedom of action."

"Go on."

"Supposing the person who carried the blanket to be the murderer, what motive could be powerful enough to induce him, or her, to pause, even for an instant, while still in close proximity to the scene of the crime?"

"A hard question to answer."

"Pardon me, an easy one, for there could be but one motive."

"What one?"

"The wish to destroy any existing evidence of the crime that might be about that person."

"Ah!"

"If the murder had been committed with a knife, and there had been a watering-trough upon that corner, the natural inference would be that the murderer stopped to wash his or her hands, and to cleanse the knife, would it not?"

"Certainly."

"Very well; this crime was committed with a pistol. The murderer could not be defiled by contact with the blood of the victim."

"No."

"But the pistol still contained an empty cartridge-shell, and the empty chamber and the pistol-barrel were, of course, blackened by burnt powder and hot grease from the bullet."

"Yes."

"If the person carrying such a weapon were found in the neighborhood, the recently-discharged revolver would be strong circumstantial evidence against that person, would it not?"

"Surely."

"Therefore the existing evidence of the crime just committed was the condition of the weapon that did the work."

"Yes."

"To destroy that evidence, the empty shell had to be removed and disposed of, the chamber and barrel of the revolver wiped clean, and the weapon reloaded."

"Hum! yes. Well?"

"All this flashed through my mind in an instant, when I discovered a circular indentation in the ground, such as would be made by a person in pressing the weight upon one heel, and turning it several times."

"I believed that I would find the cartridge-shell pressed out of sight beneath the earth, and I did."

"Bravo!"

"I then looked for a rag with which the revolver had been cleaned."

"And found it?"

"I did."

"What was it?"

"A piece torn from the center of a cambric handkerchief of very fine quality, such as a lady would carry."

"Ah!"

"That, and the size of the heel-mark convinced me that the murderer was a woman."

"What did she use for a ramrod, or cleaner, to force the rag through the empty barrel?"

"I don't know. A lead-pencil, or a piece of wire would do. But the bit of rag tells me an interesting story."

"Eh? the rag?"

"Yes."

"Did it have a name on it?"

"No; there was no mark whatever except the dirt from the weapon."

"How then does it tell you anything?"

"Let me inform you first what it tells me."

"Well?"

"It tells me that the crime was carefully premeditated, with every chance foreseen and well calculated, even to the cleansing of the weapon. It tells me that the person who committed it was thoroughly aware of the habits of the murdered man, not only when he was away from his home, but while he was in it."

"Would you mind saying how you read all that from a bit of dirty rag?"

"Not at all."

CHAPTER VII.

CHICK OUTWITTED.

"The rag," continued Nick, "was taken from the center of the handkerchief. Why? Because the border, even though it bore no name, might be recognized or matched some time. What does that indicate? Premeditation and calculation."

"The rag was cut from the handkerchief, and not torn out. What does that indicate? Premeditation and calculation."

"It shows that the person who threw that bit of rag into the street had designed it for the very purpose to which it was put, and had, therefore, taken great care to destroy all evidences by which it could by any possibility be traced to its owner."

"If the piece from which it was cut could be found, the two would fit."

"I would wager that the other piece was burned long before this one was put in use. It will never be found. It is not a clew in that sense."

"Well, what has all this to do with the previous knowledge of the murderer, regarding the habits of William Burnham?"

"This; the careful premeditation and calculation could not have been so thoroughly arranged, and the plan so successfully carried out, if it were otherwise. The rag proves the premeditation and the premeditation proves the previous knowledge. One never plans unless one knows something about the things planned about."

"True."

"To proceed. I next examined the street where the horse might have been waiting, and I found droppings and other evidences, besides wheel-marks against the curb, which convinced me that the horse had been left alone and had wandered slowly along, a step at a time, from John street, nearly to William."

"You have seen horses move along in that way, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"I am satisfied that the horse was unattended during that time, because if a person had remained in the buggy, or at the horse's head, he would not have wandered; but, even if he had, whoever had him in charge, would not have permitted him to scrape paint from the spokes and felloes as I know he did, nor to have rubbed his neck for several moments against a young tree that stands there."

"Did he do that?"

"Yes, and rubbed off a lot more sorrel hair from his neck and mane."

"Go on, please."

"The horse was turned and driven back the other way, because we know that he came through John street to Washington avenue. We have sufficient testimony that a horse was seen about that time."

"Yes. You said a little while ago that the woman had a companion."

"Yes."

"How do you prove that?"

"I don't prove it; I infer it."

"From what?"

"First, a woman, driving alone at that hour would be particularly remarked, would she not?"

"Yes."

"I have already proved careful premeditation and calculation, I believe."

"Yes."

"Very well; one who had so thoroughly calculated every other point, would not neglect one so important as this. She would provide herself with a companion."

"Second, the fact of her stopping to clean the revolver, proves her to be thoroughly cool headed. Being so, she would know exactly where she wanted to go, when she leaped into the buggy after the crime. We know that when the buggy reached the corner of John street and Washington avenue, it partly turned toward the south, and then wheeled and dashed away toward the north."

"We do not believe that she had lost her bearings, for she has already proved that she knew the ground too well for that."

"We do not believe that she was undecided which way to turn, because she had too nicely preconceived every other move."

"Why, then, did she turn?"

"Because she had a companion whom she was obliged to pick up and take away with her. He was not in sight when she reached the corner, and she knew that she must look for him in the direction of the road-house."

"But he reached the corner almost as soon as she did. He sprang into the buggy, and the course originally decided upon was taken."

"There is one more point worth considering."

"What is that?"

"I know that the buggy stopped at the corner west from Washington avenue, or John street, when it first came. I know that both its occupants got down there, and that the horse was left lone. There arises another inference."

"If the woman had determined to commit the murder, and if she had made the man her confidant, he would have remained in the buggy to wait for her, for under such circumstances, it would not do to leave the horse by himself, and thus run the risk of losing the means of escape from the scene of the contemplated crime."

"If the man did not know that such a crime was contemplated; if she brought him along with her simply as a shield, she would naturally send him upon some errand in order to clear the way for her own designs."

"In that case, the horse was stopped at the corner, and the man got out, leaving the woman in the buggy."

"She remained where she was until he was out of sight. Then she sprang from the carriage, taking the blanket or lap-robe, which ever it was with her, probably to wrap around her as a disguise, or to throw over the head of a pursuer."

"How she scaled the fence I do not know; what her motive could have been in committing the crime does not appear; but I believe that I am right, and if the murderer of William Burnham is ever discovered it will be found to be a woman, who came to the scene of the crime in a buggy drawn by a sorrel horse, exactly as I have related it."

Nick Carter had certainly worked out a remarkable case, when we consider that he began with twisting a single horse-hair around one finger.

For obvious reasons he said nothing to the superintendent about the mysterious woman who had called upon him at his Liberty-street office.

Nick was not at all satisfied that she was not a crank, and, at all events, he felt that he would rather see and talk with Chick before he committed himself in any way regarding her.

The superintendent asked him what he proposed as the next move, but Nick shook his head.

"I haven't determined yet," he said.

"I prefer to devote a little time to thinking it over before I decide what course to pursue."

"When will I see you again?"

"In a day or two. Perhaps to-morrow."

"Very good."

Nick returned to New York at once, and went immediately to his own home, where he confidently expected to find a message from Chick.

But Chick was there himself.

"So Barbara Bennett wasn't worth much attention, eh?" said the detective, when he saw Chick.

"On the contrary, I think she is."

"Then why didn't you keep her in sight?"

"Because I couldn't."

"Eh?"

"Because I couldn't."

"Do you mean to say that you let a woman outwit you?"

"I mean that she did outwit me."

"Whew!"

"Inside of an hour, too."

"You followed her when she came down from the office?"

"Of course."

"Where did she go?"

"Straight across to the Courtlandt street station of the elevated road."

"Well?"

"I went with her to the station and got on the same car."

"We rode to Twenty-third street, and there she got out."

"I followed. She walked straight through to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and went in through the ladies' entrance."

"I couldn't go in with the rig I wore, and I had no chance to make a change quick enough to do any good, so I waited."

"When it got dark, I managed to make myself somewhat more respectable without losing sight of that door."

"By and by I walked boldly in and went to the ladies' parlor."

"My party wasn't there, and, after satisfying myself of that fact, I went to the hotel office and inquired if a lady named Barbara Bennett was stopping there."

"There was no such name on the books, and it was entirely unknown to the clerks."

"I hung around the place nearly all night, making frequent changes in my disguise to avoid attracting attention."

"But it was no use.

"I haven't seen Barbara Bennett since she entered the hotel, and it's my opinion that I won't.

"Where she went to is more than I can say, and I would not be surprised if she dissolved into air, or something equally impossible."

Chick was greatly chagrined over his failure, for it was the first time that he had ever been defeated in that way.

"Do you think she left the hotel, Chick?" asked the detective.

"Of course."

"I don't."

"Why?"

"I believe that she is stopping there under another name, and I think I will become a guest of the house myself for a few days."

"What shall I do?"

"Find Blanche Bullard, and verify the statements concerning her, made by the woman you lost. Get all the particulars you can, and bring them to me at the hotel."

"What name?"

"I will call myself Dudley Graham."

"When will you go there?"

"Now."

"Any further instructions?"

"Only do your best. If you light upon a clew of any kind, follow it. If such a person as Albert Dornier exists and you can get any track of him, do so. I feel that the first necessity of this case is to find Barbara Bennett again."

CHAPTER VIII.

CHICK'S ADVENTURE.

That night saw Nick installed as a guest of the hotel.

He was religiously observant of the hours for meals; he frequented the ladies' parlors more than gentlemen usually do, and he passed his time in closely watching the faces of every female guest, using every opportunity that he could get for that purpose.

Nevertheless, three days passed and brought absolutely no result, and he was forced to the conclusion that Chick was right, and that the woman had gone into the hotel and out again by some other entrance, somehow managing to leave no trace of her transit.

"Three days wasted," he mused, as he paid his bill at the office and strolled through the wide corridor toward Broadway. "It is rather strange, too, that I have heard nothing from Chick."

But the thought had scarcely framed itself in his mind when he saw the object of his thoughts approaching at a rapid walk.

"Any luck?" asked Chick, as he joined the detective.

"No. How is it with you?"

"I have met with several remarkable experiences."

"Have, eh? Come over to Slosson's. We can sit down there and talk without being disturbed."

They went together to Slosson's famous billiard-room, little thinking that the chance, that took them there was to be productive of the key which would ultimately reveal the very mystery with which they were contending.

Two seats were found in the south-west corner of the room.

"Now, tell me your story?" said Nick; "did you see the Bullard girl?"

"Yes."

"Talk with her?"

"Yes."

"And had she been engaged by a woman to steal some papers from Burnham?"

"Yes; she would not admit it, at first, but I finally got it out of her. But I got more."

"What?"

"A copy of the papers."

"What?"

"Fact."

"Then she kept the papers, and substituted others in their places, eh?"

"No."

"What, then?"

"She simply took them from the package, copied them, and then replaced them where she had found them."

"Smart girl!"

"You bet!"

"The Bennett woman lied, then, when she said that Blanche Bullard did not deliver the right papers to her."

"Yes."

"Was it true about her going and claiming her thousand dollars back again?"

"Yes."

"Did the Bullard girl confess that she had copied the papers?"

"No."

"So Barbara Bennett has no idea of that, eh?"

"No."

"Humph!"

"Queer business, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"What was her dodge—Barbara Bennett's I mean—in first trying to convince the woman who stole the papers for her, that they were not the right ones, and then, in coming to you, to engage you to find property that was in her possession all the time? Perhaps she had a reason in setting you onto the murderer, and thought that this was a good way to do it, while, at the same time, she——"

Suddenly Nick's countenance cleared.

"Chick," he exclaimed, "you've struck it."

"Struck what?"

"The solution of the mystery."

"Have I? Then it must be a case of unconscious brilliancy."

"It is, lad."

"Humph!"

"You have asked a question which I can easily answer, but which I had not thought to ask in just that way."

"Glad of it."

"It has been drifting around in my cranium for the last ten minutes, and you have clenched it for me."

"Would you mind being a little more explicit?"

"No. I will tell you what I mean without stopping to give my reasons."

"It was the woman who calls herself Barbara Bennett, who shot William Burnham. There was a man with her whom she managed to deceive, and who, to this day, probably has no idea that she committed the murder."

"Must be an ass."

"No; she is unusually keen. She wants to get rid of him as well as of Burnham. She has arranged her meshes so that when clews enough are found to lead to his being suspected and captured, there will be a chain of circumstantial evidence which cannot help but convict him of the crime."

"She relies upon his loyalty not to mention the fact that she was with him that night, for, having no idea that she shot Burnham, he will not connect her with his misfortunes."

"She came to me, Chick, simply to make me her tool in helping her get rid of this man by fixing the crime upon him, and I'll prove it before I'm very much older, or my name is not Nick Carter."

"Now, let us go back to your story. You persuaded the Bullard girl to let you copy the copies that she had?"

"Yes."

"Have you got them with you?"

"Yes."

"Are they as she described them?"

"Not exactly. Shall I hand them over?"

"Not now. Is there a marriage certificate?"

"Yes."

"Between the parties she named?"

"Between Barbara Bates instead of Bennett, and William Judson, instead of William Burnham Judson."

"And the deed?"

"Is made by Barbara Bates to William Judson for the consideration of one dollar."

"What does it convey?"

"A piece of land one hundred feet square, with a one-story frame house, situated on Fifteenth street in Kansas City."

"Ah! a road-house."

"Yes; and it can't be worth over two thousand dollars."

"What about the will?"

"It isn't a will."

"What is it?"

"A confession made by a dying man. It is an odd document, and I fancy has much to do with the murder, as well as with considerable property which, it confesses, is the proceeds of numerous crimes. Here it is. Read it. You will notice that the name has been entirely obliterated."

Nick took the paper and read as follows:

"I am dying. After a long life of crime, one who should have been executed by the law dies on his bed a natural death. I have two children. My son disappeared twenty years ago, and I have not seen him since, although I have good reason to believe that he still lives. He is a criminal like myself. I taught him to be one. My daughter is in New York, and this is my last message to her. It is to take the place of a will, and she is to follow its directions implicitly."

"I have thirty thousand dollars in cash hidden away where nobody can find it without the directions that I leave. The money is the proceeds of many a crime ranging from petty-thievery to murder. No one but a criminal would consent to use it, and I leave it to my daughter Barbara. No matter how wicked I may be, or have been, she is worse. For that reason I leave her my blessing."

"There are two papers in existence besides this, and the three form the key to the hiding-place of my money. Barbara knows where the other papers are. One is a deed, and the other a marriage certificate. She knows how to discover the secret from all three, for I have often told her."

There had been a name signed, but it was so thoroughly obliterated that it was illegible.

"These are only copies, Chick?" said Nick.

"That's all."

"They are worthless, except to prove the motive of the crime. The secret can only be found on the originals."

"Why?"

"It was probably written there with some kind of invisible ink, which only becomes legible when submitted to heat, or to some chemical test."

"These papers were stolen and delivered to Barbara Bennett or Bates before Burnham was killed."

"Exactly."

"Then what motive had she for killing him?"

"He knew too much."

"Eh?"

"In some way, she discovered from the papers that Burnham had already found the secret. She feared the use that he would make of his knowledge, or else she believed that he would secure the thirty thousand dollars, if he lived, and she killed him."

"Do you notice how that confession is crumpled?"

"Yes."

"About an hour after I left Blanche Bullard, a man approached me, who asked if I would give him a little piece of paper on which to write a note."

"I took my papers from my coat-pocket to find something for him, when he made a grab for the whole lot."

"He only got one, and that happened to be the one."

"As he grabbed it, he started and ran."

"We had a good open road before us, and I took after him."

"He saw that I was gaining and likely to overtake him, and suddenly he stopped, picked up a stone, wrapped the paper around it, and hurled them both as far out into the river as he could."

"Then he turned and legged it again with all his might."

"I wanted the paper a good deal more than I did him, and so I stopped."

"The paper, fortunately, slipped from the stone and did not even go into the water, so that I easily secured it. Now, what do you think of all that?"

"He must have known that you had those papers in your possession."

"Yes, unless he was simply a thief who was grabbing all that he could get."

"Hardly that. He would have grabbed your watch instead of the papers, had that been the case. Was he a——"

Nick paused suddenly, for Chick reached out his hand.

"Nick," he said, "do you see that young man who just came in?"

"Standing near the cashier's desk?"

"Yes."

"I see him."

"That is either the fellow that grabbed the papers or it's his younger brother. This man is younger and better dressed, but I'll bet my life he's the same one."

"Good! How were you dressed when he saw you?"

"Just as I am now."

"Good again. He has not seen us yet. Slip away from me, and wait until I get quite close to him. Then go up and accuse him of grabbing your papers. Don't make a row; do it in a good-natured way."

"Suppose I happen to be wrong?"

"You must admit that you are wrong before you are through with him. Apologize, open a bottle, do anything to set the matter right, and leave the rest to me."

"If, after you have talked with him, you are convinced that you really are wrong, suddenly recognize me as an old acquaintance. If you believe that you are right, and he is the man, don't notice me."

"Correct!"

CHAPTER IX.

DORNING'S DOUBLE.

Chick carried out the arrangement to the letter.

He waited until Nick was in close proximity to the man who had just entered, who stood with one elbow resting upon the counter adjoining the cashier's desk.

Then he stepped forward and touched him lightly upon the shoulder.

"Good-evening," he said, quietly.

The stranger turned haughtily toward him.

"You have the advantage of me, I think, sir," he said.

"Well, you ought to know me," replied Chick, coolly.

"Ought I? I am glad to say that I do not."

"I am the man from whose hands you grabbed a package of papers in New Jersey yesterday."

"What!"

"Didn't you hear me?"

"Are you trying to provoke a quarrel with a stranger? are you drunk? are you a lunatic? or are you only a loafer?"

The questions were accompanied by a cool stare that was most tantalizing and for a moment Chick was nettled.

"I am not endeavoring to provoke a quarrel," he said, keeping his temper, because when I do that, I pick out somebody nearer my size; I am not drunk, for the very good reason that I have not taken a drink to-day. I am not a lunatic, because I have a distinct memory of events which happened yesterday, and I am not a loafer, as you, yourself, can perceive."

"Ah, indeed! What are you?"

In a war with words, the fellow's cool audacity was rapidly proving too much for Chick.

"I am a detective!" he said, coldly, "and I believe I recognize in you a person who assaulted me yesterday. I may be mistaken. If I am, I will apologize. If I am not, I will arrest you and take you to police headquarters, if it is the last effort of my life. If I have made a mistake, the fault lies in your resemblance to the man for whom I take you, and it is for you to set me right."

The demeanor of the haughty individual changed at once.

"Pardon me," he said. "I had no idea that you were an officer. I think, however, that I can set you right at once."

"Please do so. I shall be very glad to know that I am wrong."

"I was in this room from two until 6.30 yesterday. Did your encounter happen between those hours?"

"Yes; about three."

He turned to the cashier.

"Do you remember me?" he asked.

"Perfectly."

"Did you see me here yesterday?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember at which table I played?"

"Yes."

"Which one?"

"No. 3."

"This gentleman and I have a bet. Will you tell him how you happen to remember me so well?"

"Certainly; if you wish it."

"I do."

"Because you gave me a ten-dollar bill in payment for your games, and the bill was a counterfeit."

The stranger smiled at Chick.

"For once I may say that there is luck in a counterfeit bill," he said. "I had taken it in change for a larger bill, without noticing what it was. It was so palpably a counterfeit that it is a wonder that I ever received it. Are you satisfied, or shall I ask the cashier a few more questions?"

"I am perfectly satisfied, and I beg your pardon."

"Granted, my dear sir."

"The resemblance is most striking. Will you give me your card?"

"Certainly."

Cards were exchanged, and Chick glanced at the one that was handed to him.

He nearly dropped in his astonishment.

Recovering himself instantly, he pronounced the name aloud, for the benefit of Nick, who stood close by an interested observer of all that transpired.

"Albert Dorning," he exclaimed. "Why, I once had a schoolmate by that name, but he was fair, and you are dark."

It will be remembered that Albert Dorning had been described by Barbara Bennett as being fair, and with side-whiskers adorning his face.

The person before Chick was young, quite dark, and wore only a mustache.

In spite of the very complete *alibi* that Dorning had established, Chick still believed him to be the man, whom, on the day previous, he had encountered in New Jersey.

There was another mystery somewhere, he was certain.

At all events, he resolved to give the cue to Nick and leave him to work it out.

He talked with his new acquaintance for several moments, invited him to have a bottle of wine with him, which invitation was politely declined, and at length withdrew, leaving the room altogether.

But another surprise awaited the faithful young assistant.

He walked through Twenty-third street, intending to take the elevated road down town.

He had just reached the stairs on the uptown side, when he came face to face with Albert Dorning.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he muttered.

Then he stepped forward very quickly, and, sticking out his hand, exclaimed:

"Why good-evening, Mr. Dorning. How do you do?"

There was an instant's hesitation, as though the other were entirely taken aback, and then a light seemed to break over his face.

"Ah, good-evening!" he replied. "Glad to see you, I'm sure. Hope you're well."

"Yes, thanks! Where have you been keeping yourself?" exclaimed the young detective, with all the heartiness he could muster. "I haven't seen you in several days."

"I've been around as usual."

"This is the fellow that played billiards yesterday, while the other one was grabbing my papers," was what was passing in Chick's mind. "Two of them are playing at doubles. Now, I wonder what for."

A few more commonplaces were exchanged, and then Chick bade his supposed friend good-night, and ran up the steps toward the elevated station.

There was no one on the stairs, and Chick worked one of his quick changes.

He put on a mustache and goatee, substituted a soft felt-hat for the high crush-hat that he then wore, changed his necktie and scarf-pin, and then started in the wake of the man with whom he had just been talking.

"Didn't know me from Adam," muttered Chick, as he went along. "Thinks the other fellow does, and he has to keep up the game."

"Humph! Nick will stick to Dorning No. 1, and I will stick to Dorning No. 2. Unless I am greatly mistaken, we will meet before long."

"Hello. Fifth avenue, eh? That's where the woman Barbara Bennett went. I wonder—"

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, suddenly. "I'll bet that's the game!"

He managed to be close enough to the man he was following, so that when he asked for his key, the detective ascertained the number of the room he occupied.

Dorning No. 2 went to his room at once, and Chick got a cigar, and began strolling up and down watching for Nick to appear in the wake of Dorning No. 1.

Hour after hour passed, and he did not come.

"Wonder what's up?" mused Chick. "It can't be that they are playing billiards all this time."

The hour was getting late.

Employees around the hotel began to look askance at Chick, who, they thought, had loafed there long enough.

"Guess I'll go out and work a change," he mused. "They don't seem to like this rig as well as they did when I first came in."

He started for the door, reached it, and was about to pass out to Broadway, when he saw Dorning No. 1 approaching at a rapid walk.

Chick turned instantly and went back toward the desk, walking sufficiently slow, so that Dorning would overtake him.

He calculated the speed to a nicety, and stood where he again heard the number of the room when it was requested.

Then, as Dorning No. 1 went on his way, Chick again went out onto Broadway.

"They're bold, anyway," he mused. "They pass for the same person outside, and for brothers, or anyhow for two persons in the house. I wonder where Nick is. He ought to be in the wake of this fellow somewhere."

But Nick did not appear.

Chick waited and watched for a long time, but in vain.

* * * * *

Let us return to the moment when Chick left the billiard-room.

Nick, it will be remembered, was in the background, closely observing and listening to all that took place.

He heard the *alibi* talked over, and wondered if Chick had really made a mistake, but when young Hercules left the place without making the signal, Nick was forced to believe that Chick considered himself correct, in spite of the *alibi*.

Fifteen minutes had not elapsed after Chick left the billiard-room before Albert Dorning also took his departure.

Nick sauntered out carelessly, but keeping his man in sight all the time.

They crossed Broadway, and went northward as far as the Hoffman House.

Dorning entered and went straight to the telephone office.

He was closeted in one of the little compartments for several moments.

Nick did not know what occurred there, until long afterward, but for the benefit of the reader, we will reveal it now.

Having secured the desired number, Dorning began the one-sided conversation, as follows:

"Hello!"

"Is that Peter?"

"Is Ben there?"

"Ask him to come to the 'phone."

A short wait, and then—

"Hello Ben!"

"Say, do you remember the name of the man I was talking about at our last conversation?"

"His first name begins with N."

"I want you to do what we talked about."

"To-night."

"I will arrange the preliminaries."

"Yes. Watch your chance and look out for the man behind me, no matter how he's dressed."

"Do you thoroughly understand?"

"All right. He has no idea that I know him. There was a time—but never mind; you know what I want done now."

"Well, good-by."

If Nick could have heard what was said, just as we

have recorded it, he would have had some warning of the plot that was being laid against him.

He would, at least, have realized that he was known to the person whom he was shadowing, and would have been even more cautious than he was.

But he did not hear it, and therefore he could not possibly know that anything threatened him.

While Dorning was in the telephone compartment, Nick improved the opportunity to make a few alterations in his disguise, so that when the object of his vigilance again appeared, the detective would not be recognized as one who had been in the billiard-room but a short time before.

As for Dorning, he somehow knew that Nick Carter was on his track.

Knowing that, he also knew that he would never leave it; no matter what disguise he might assume, he would still be there.

Dorning traded upon the well-known tenacity and skill of the great detective.

CHAPTER X.

THE RESCUE.

Presently Dorning left the Hoffman House.

He turned leisurely up Broadway, walking slowly, and evidently with no object in view but strolling.

At Thirty-fourth street, he turned onto Sixth avenue, never pausing until he reached the corner of Forty-second street.

There he waited until a west-bound car came along.

He boarded that, passing inside, and seating himself, while Nick rode upon the platform.

At Tenth avenue, he left the car and turned south, walking rapidly, while Nick, again making a few alterations, pursued.

They passed Forty-first street, then Fortieth street, and presently reached Thirty-ninth.

There, Dorning again turned westward.

The neighborhood, in many respects, is as bad as any in New York.

Nick understood that fact thoroughly, but it did not once occur to him that he was in any danger.

He began to wonder where the elegantly-dressed young man was leading him, and to calculate upon how long a time would elapse before some gang of hoodlums would espy the diamond upon Dorning's tie, and seek to obtain it.

Presently Nick's route took him past an alley-way that was as dark as Erebus.

He had just passed it when three forms leaped out upon him.

Every man of them held a bludgeon in his hand, and before Nick had any chance to defend himself, he was struck upon the head and felled to the ground.

The blow was, however, a glancing one.

While it partially stunned the detective for a moment, it did not render him senseless.

He had sense enough to remain perfectly still, for he well knew that if he moved it would only be a signal for another blow, more deadly than the first, and that he should probably be killed.

He heard footsteps rapidly approaching, and for an instant believed that help was at hand.

But he quickly discovered his mistake.

"Is he done for, Ben?" asked a voice that Nick recognized as belonging to Dorning.

"He's deader'n a herrin', boss," was the gruff reply.

"Well, run a knife in him to make sure."

Nick shuddered.

"Ef ye want any knifin' done, do it yerself," was Ben's curt reply. "I say 'e's dead, an' I reckon as 'ow my job's done: Go through him, lads."

"Stop!"

It was Dorning who spoke again.

"I pay you for this job, Ben, and I don't want any loot- ing on this lay. Do you understand?"

"Yes," sullenly.

"Pick him up and carry him into the shanty," was the next order.

"Best chuck him into the river."

"Best do as I say, unless you want a hole through you," was the curt response.

Nick felt himself seized and lifted from the ground.

He knew that he was being carried through the alley from which the men who had attacked him had issued.

Presently they paused and dropped him roughly upon the ground.

Then he heard a door unlocked, and he was raised again and borne through into a place of inky blackness. Through his closed eyelids, he presently realized that some kind of a light had been obtained.

"Now, Ben," said Dorning, "send the others out. You and I can do the rest without any help."

Two of the men left, leaving Nick alone with Ben and Dorning, and he was just making ready to leap up and tackle the two of them, when Dorning's cold voice broke the silence again:

"My revolver is pointing at your heart, Nick Carter," he said. "I know that you are not dead; I know that you can hear me. If you move, or make any effort to escape, I will shoot. Bind him, Ben."

Ben set to work. He wound stout cords around Nick's legs and body, rendering him absolutely helpless.

"Now, put him on the trap, Ben."

Nick was moved to a spot which he judged to be in the center of the floor.

Then Ben was told to go.

"Nick Carter," said Dorning, coldly, "in an hour you will be dead, so just to amuse you I will tell you a few secrets about that murder that interests you. Do you want to hear them?"

"Yes."

"Very well. First, I am a woman. I am Barbara Bennett, or Bates, alias a dozen other names. I am the woman who called upon you when you played Old Thunderbolt. I wanted to engage you to find those papers because the originals have been lost, for although I have what seems to be the right ones, they are copies. I believed that you could find them for me, and if, by chance, you happened to hang my brother Bert during the process, I did not much care.

"I was once foolish enough to fall in love with Will Burnham, and he managed to worm the story of my father's life out of me. Ultimately he got possession of the papers and hid them away. I could not find them, and I could not get them from him by threats, and so, being fearful that he would get possession of the money, I shot him, trusting to luck to find the papers after he was dead.

"I have not succeeded.

"He had probably hidden them somewhere where nobody else will ever find them.

"I saw that you were too hot upon my track, and I laid this little plan to put you out of the way.

"Good-night, Nickie; I'll meet you in Hades."

She kicked a bolt as she ceased speaking, and Nick shot down into a black and foul smelling pit, followed by a heartless laugh.

Consciousness left him when he struck the bottom of the pit.

How long he remained thus, he did not know, but it could have been but a few moments.

When he opened his eyes, he tried to move his arms, but he was as absolutely helpless as though he were in reality dead.

He tried time after time, but each attempt proved more useless than the preceding one.

He had just given up, convinced that he had at last met his fate, when he heard footsteps overhead.

A moment later the trap was raised, and, looking up, he could see the forbidding countenance of Ben, as he tried to peer down into the darkness.

"Ello there!" he shouted, presently. "Hare ye alive?"

"Yes," replied Nick.

"Ave ye got a bank account?"

"Yes."

"Got ten thousan' quid?"

"Yes."

"Be you Nick Carter?"

"Yes."

"Ef I'll save ye, will ye give me ten thousand dollars in cold cash, an' let me go to boot?"

"I will."

"Promise."

"I promise."

"By yer dead father's ghost?"

"Yes."

"I'll do it."

He left the trap and presently returned with a ladder, which he lowered into the hole.

Then he came down.

The cords which bound the detective were soon cut, and he was once more free, saved from a most horrible death.

Nick always carried a good supply of cash.

He was not without some, then.

He drew out a roll of bills, and placed it in Ben's hands.

"There are a thousand dollars," he said. "Come to my house to-morrow at noon, and you shall have the balance."

"I'll be there, boss." *

Nick thanked Ben for the service that had been done, and hurried way.

Of course, he had no idea that the woman who had come so near to being his murderer, had gone to the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

He did not know where to look for her, so he went directly home, and happened to arrive at the same moment as Chick.

Mutual confidences were quickly exchanged, and as Chick's information revealed the spot where the murderous woman was at that moment, Nick concluded to lose no time.

"Come," he said to Chick, "we will go now, and finish this work."

They went together.

The hotel people were quietly told of the errand, and, after making the condition that there should be no celebrity or newspaper-talk about the matter, they offered every facility to the assistance of the detectives.

Nick went to the door of the room occupied by the brother and sister, who passed as brothers, and rapped.

"Who is there?" came a question a moment later.

"Bell-boy with a telegram," answered Nick.

The door was opened, and Nick leaped inside, seizing Barbara Bates as he did so.

For once, she gave a truly feminine scream.

"A ghost!" she cried.

"Yes," replied Nick, grimly, "the ghost of your crimes. Your day is past, Barbara."

* The detective has told me that he never came. What his fate was, is a mystery. AUTHOR.

[THE END.]

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